

[Postal Telegraph Operators]

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Swenson

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LIVING FOLKLORE Subject: Folklore of Communications

ACA - Postel Telegraph Operators Place: Workers' lunchroom at 20 Broad St. 7th floor

Informants: Groups of individuals who go in and out of the lunchroom during their 15 minute relief periods. The following material has been reconstructed from the "table talk" of the workers, after "listening in" at their discussions on several occasions.

Hello Don - how's the boy?

So, so. This cake is made of rubber.

You said it. I'm sick of the food around here. With 15 minutes its not enough to get to your locker and downstairs seven flights to a cafeteria before time's up. You have to eat here or not eat - and they know it, so what do they give you? - goulash.... Say, where you going on vacation this year?

I get two weeks in July. I think I'll go up North, maybe Maine or else in the Adirondacks. Rent a cabin on a lake. Think of it— for two whole weeks, 24 hours a day I wont have to lay my eyes on one of those pink sheets with 'Postel Tel' on a blue border. No machines, no key pounding, no code strips, no nothing— only me and the mountain breezes and the sound of the line and floater hitting the water— Fishing from dawn to dark— oh boy—

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That reminds me— last summer I went fishing with my old man up around Cape Cod. Gee, those were two perfect weeks. But, y'know the second day away, when I'd managed to put Postel Tel in the attic, guess what? I get a wire— a wire, mind you— from Ernie— you know he was on the night shift— [so he sneaks?] a wire through to me, and it says in code — “Don't forget to sign the timesheet— how's your message rate? I'm having a swell swell time— 83 - 72 plus 444— Wish you was here.” So I threw him a [?] wire back collect— and I says, “To hell with timesheet. I sign in on the bay at 5 A. M. My mess rate today was 40 pounds of bass and bluefish. Having swell time without you here.” How do you like that? A peach, huh?

Yeah— We'd better shove along— I got one minute. Hi, girls— Have a piece of rubber cake— So long.....

Ruthie, Y'should of seen this dress— the top was a sort of cream colored, with a full skirt and a narrow red velvet belt— very high waisted—

I'll bet it's a darling on you. Soon's I get my check, I'm going to get my blue coat cleaned, and get a pair of blue swued shoes, you know, with a strap heel and an open toe. Look, here comes Selma— she's got a ring— wait, she'll call your attention to it. She's been flashing it all over the place—

Well, girls— look, at last!

Oh, Selma, how perfectly stunning. I'm so happy for you, dear. When'll it be?

Wait, let me get a bite into this—aaah— corn beef again— they don't have no choice around here. Oh, well my dears, don't take this little gadget so seriously— you know, I haven't really thought of— I haven't made up my mind to marry Roy. I only agreed to be engaged to him— He's a sweet boy— I've been in love with him for two years— I never even see another fellow. You know me. But marriage— you know what I mean— I mean

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it's alright and all that— maybe later, when you want to settle down, have a couple kids — you know. But when I do that, it probably wont be Roy— He's sweet and all— nice to run around with— a divine dancer— but well, you know what I mean, he's too acquisitive, too possessive, jelous— I want freedom. Still, it gives a girl a certain prestige— you know what I mean— if she can sport a diamond. Other fellows look at her with respect. It gives one an outlook, so to speak. Other fellows sort of get interested— competition, you know —

Say, Benny sent me a plant for Easter. Wasn't that sweet? A little note on it: "Don't forget to water me, and I'll grow up to be crazy about you like— your— Benny Goodstein."

How cute. Benny's a cute boy. I could go for him myself. But you certainly got him on the leish, Ruthie.

Last time I weighed, I found I lost two pounds. Y'know, eating sandwiches and coffee six times a day spoils your appetite for a real meal.

Say, y'know these fortune-telling scales—? Well, I got a slip saying, "Your love life will be a hectic one. You are psychologically an impetuous person—(or something like that— imagine—) You wear your heart on your sleeve, you are open to auto-suggestion— your legs work in reflex." How do you like that? My legs work in reflex! What does it mean, my legs work in reflex?

Dotty 's married. She should know. How about it Dot?

It means when you're running to catch a bus before the green light goes on— why, your legs work in reflex.

Oh, yeah? Well, suppose I ride the, subway.

Grace, you're hopeless. You should take lessons from J. T.

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Look, who's talking. So he's been stepping you too.

No, I just heard a thing or two. Did you know Bertha Dixon's expecting a baby? It's begun to show, and the floorman advised her to take a leave of three weeks. Know what she said? She says to him, 'Three weeks? Why three weeks? I'd have to lay off for six months!' She told him she's going to stay on the job till the last minute. Imagine! I think its terrible— the poor kid will [?] soon look like a stuffed goose, and everyone will notice her. They say it's J.T.s.

Oh well, Bertha won't care. I think she's proud of it.

Let's get up a naming contest. Whoever suggests the best name for Bertha's brat, is exempt from union dues and assessments for three months.

Make it exempt for life, and I'm on.

Listen, I suggest we call it 'Postel Nell', if it's a girl!

Well, dears, I gotta scram. Want to make my locker before I go back on the machine. So long.

So long, Sel— take care of the glassware!

Ruthie, that was a dirty dig— you devil! Listen, the new floorman stopped at my machine today, and he says, 'How you doing?' So I looks up at him, give him the bright eye, and I says, 'I could do better without you breathing down my neck every five minutes— The humidity's bad enough', I says, 'without that', I says. [?] Oh, you didn't really!

So help me, I did. Well, anyway, words to that effect. If you know what I mean.

He's fresh. I don't like his looks. He has sweaty hands. Y'know how he puts his [?] paw casually on your shoulder. Gives me the shivers.

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The other man we had was better. Old Freddy, Baldy Freddy— You could do anything with him— powder your nose in the middle of taking a rush wire— He wouldn't say a word.

I used to keep a crossword puzzle on my lap and fool with it between times. While I'd be [?] marking the time on the blank with one hand, I'd fill in a word with the other. Gee, one day though, Freddie came up behind me, and he catches on, and he stoops down, whispers in my ear, 'A monkey in three letters ending with e, is Ape!' He meant it for an insult, but I wasn't phased. I laughed, at him and wrote it in right in front of his nose. 'Thanx', I said. 'You're a big help. If I win the contest, I'll split with you.' So he laughed too; and walked on.

Grace, listen to me— you watch your step. You may think its funny— but I've seen girls get the sack for a lot less than that. Never trust a super. They kid with you, and then turn in your number. Next payday, you get a suspension, and then you don't know even who to blame. [?] C'mon, let's get going— it's two minutes to. Let me have your lipstick, Ruthie.

So long, gals. See you on the floor.

So long, take care of yourself. So long.